



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4312/keria.22.2.25-55>

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Sex and Agreement: (Mis)matching Natural and Grammatical Gender in Greek¹

“Sex is the most important referential feature reflected in gender assignment”
(Luraghi 2013)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Greek word γένος may refer to ‘sex’ as well as ‘gender’. The concept of grammatical gender is obviously connected with the idea of biological sex, as emerges from the use of the adjectives ἄρρην ‘male’ and θηλύς ‘female’ to distinguish masculine and feminine nouns. According to Aristotle, it was Protagoras who introduced the concept of grammatical gender:

- (1) Πρωταγόρας τὰ γένη τῶν ὀνομάτων διήρει, ἄρρενα καὶ θηλέα καὶ σκεύη.
Protagoras distinguished the classes of nouns, males and females and things.
(Arist., *Rhet.* 1407b)

I prefer to translate ἄρρενα καὶ θηλέα here as ‘male and female’, i.e. male and female beings, rather than ‘masculine and feminine’ (sc. noun classes), because of their juxtaposition with σκεύη ‘things’.² The choice of terminology

1 Research for this paper was done while the author was an Associate of Harvard’s Center for Hellenic Studies in 2019. A preliminary version was presented at the Round Table on “Greek Language and Grammatical Gender” at Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana (January 14, 2020). The author wishes to thank the organizers, Jerneja Kavčič and Christina Manouilidou, for their invitation and hospitality.

2 Cf. Corbeil (2008: 80); Wartelle (1982: 66) translates ἄρρην as ‘mâle’ in reference to humans, i.e. children (*Rhet.* 1361a6), but as ‘masculin’ in reference to noun classes (*Rhet.* 1407b6-8), θηλύς as

suggests a division between animate beings, subdivided into male and female, on the one hand, and inanimate objects on the other.³ Aristotle himself seems to prefer the term τὰ μεταξύ ‘the in-between’ (*Poet.* 1458a).⁴

Dionysius Thrax is the first grammarian we know of to have used the terminology which has become accepted in the Greek and Roman grammatical tradition:

- (2) γένη μὲν οὖν εἰσι τρία· ἀρσενικόν, θηλυκόν, οὐδέτερον

There are in fact three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. (*GG* 1.1.24)

Dionysius adds that others distinguish two additional genders: **κοινόν τε καὶ ἐπίκοινον** ‘common and epicene’ (*GG* 1.125).⁵ Both can be used to refer to male as well as female beings, but whereas common nouns distinguish grammatical gender by agreement, epicene nouns do not. Examples of common nouns given by Dionysius include ὁ ~ ἡ ἵππος ‘horse ~ mare’ and ὁ ~ ἡ κύων ‘dog ~ bitch’; examples of epicene nouns are restricted to animals and include ἡ χελιδών ‘swallow’ [M/F] and ὁ ἀετός ‘eagle’ [M/F] (*GG* 1.125).

2. EPICENE NOUNS

Aesop’s fables unsurprisingly abound with such epicene nouns. The fable of the eagle and the fox, for instance, seems to be about two *female* animals and their young, but ὁ ἀετός being an epicene masculine noun (and one of the examples cited by Dionysius Thrax) as opposed to ἡ ἀλώπηξ, which is an epicene feminine noun, both trigger obligatory grammatical agreement patterns on pronouns and participles which have no relation with their biological sex:

- (3) ἀετός καὶ ἀλώπηξ φιλίαν πρὸς ἀλλήλους ποιησάμενοι πλησίον ἑαυτῶν οἰκεῖν διέγνωσαν ... καὶ διὴ ὁ μὲν ἀναβάς ἐπὶ τι περίμηκες δένδρον ἐνεοττοποίησατο· ἡ δὲ εἰσελθοῦσα εἰς τὸν ὑποκείμενον θάμνον ἔτεκεν.

An eagle [M] and a fox [F] who had befriended [M] each other decided to live close to each other ... and so the former [M] went up [M] a very high tree to hatch, whereas the latter [F] went inside [F] the underlying bush to give birth.

(Aesop. 1 Hausrath-Hunger)

‘féminin, de sexe ou de genre féminin’ (1982: 193), in reference to the same passages, and σκεῦος as ‘mot (nom, adjectif, pronom) neutre’ (1982: 388).

3 Cf. Schmidhauser (2010: 501), Novokhatko (2020: 107).

4 Singular τὸ μεταξύ (*Arist., Poet.* 166b; *Soph. el.* 173b).

5 Dionysius’ wording ἔτι δὲ προστιθέασι τούτοις ἄλλα δύο ‘but some add to these two others’ (*GG* 1.1.24) indicates that he was not the inventor of the traditional terminology.

The fable of the tortoise and the eagle has survived in different versions, two of which are worthwhile comparing (Aesop. 259 Hausrath-Hunger):

(4a) **χελώνη θεασαμένη** ἀετὸν πετόμενον ἐπεθύμησε καὶ αὐτὴ πέτεσθαι

A tortoise [F] who saw [F] an eagle fly wished to fly herself [F].

(4b) **χέλυσ ἄρρηγ θεασάμενος** ἀετὸν ἐπεθύμησε καὶ αὐτὸς πετασθῆναι

A male [M] tortoise [F] who saw [M] an eagle wished to fly himself [M].

The sex of the eagle is undetermined in both versions, ἀετός being an epicine masculine noun (and one of the examples cited by Dionysius Thrax) and seemingly irrelevant for the purpose of the fable. The two words for ‘tortoise’, ἡ χελώνη and ἡ χέλυσ, are both epicine feminine nouns and both are used alternately in the Homeric hymn to Mercurius to refer to the same mountain tortoise: χέλυσ ὄρεισι ζώουσα ‘a tortoise [F] who is living [F] in the mountains’ (*h.Merc.* 33), ὄρεσκόιοιο χελώνης ‘of the mountain-dwelling [M/F] tortoise [F]’ (*h.Merc.* 44). The sex of the tortoise in the first version of the fable (4a) is therefore undetermined and, again, seemingly irrelevant. The agreement of the participle θεασαμένη and the pronoun αὐτὴ with χελώνη is, in other words, obligatory and purely grammatical. In the second version, however, the turtle is overtly marked as male by the agreement of the participle θεασάμενος and the pronoun αὐτός with χέλυσ, which would have been ungrammatical, had it not been for the added adjective ἄρρηγ. One can only guess at the reason(s) why the author of this version thought it necessary to explicitly present the tortoise as a male—because he wants to “fly like an eagle” out of male vanity, male arrogance, male hubris or perhaps all of the above?

3. NATURAL GENDER AND DECLENSION

In a well-known scene from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, Socrates is presented as having even more original, albeit quite radical solutions to the problem of common nouns in his education of Strepsiades on the topic of gender assignment and gender marking (*Nub.* 658-93).⁶ Socrates is playing on the ambiguity on the ambiguity of the adjective ἄρρηγ, when he asks Strepsiades which four-legged animals are properly male / masculine (τῶν τετραπόδων ἄττ’

6 As for the source for the scene, Wackernagel (1928: 4), Corbeil (2008: 80) and Willi (2003: 99) acknowledge Protagoras, Sommerstein (1982: 196) and Henderson (1998: 97⁵⁹) Prodicus. Dover mentions Protagoras in connection with “the genders of nouns”, but refers to Prodicus in connection with the use of ὀρθώς at *Nub.* 659 (1968: 182). Willi rightly stresses the “composite picture” of the Aristophanic Socrates in *Clouds* “as a result of much comic freedom” (2003: 116; cf. Langslow’s note on Wackernagel’s current identification of Socrates with Protagoras [2009: 402’]).

ἔστιν ὀρθῶς ἄρρενα, *Nub.* 659). Strepsiades, of course, immediately starts enumerating what he thinks are “properly male” animals: κριός ‘ram’, τράγος ‘billygoat’, ταῦρος ‘bull’, κύων ‘dog’, ἀλεκτρύων ‘fowl’ (*Nub.* 661). Whereas the first three are prototypical second-declension nouns which unquestionably refer to male animals, the last two are in fact common nouns which may refer to males and females alike: κύων is one of the examples cited by Dionysius Thrax (cf. *supra*), but Socrates instead focuses on ἀλεκτρύων:⁷

- (5) ὀρᾶς ἃ πάσχεις; τήν τε θήλειαν καλεῖς | ἀλεκτρύονα κατὰ ταῦτό καὶ τὸν ἄρρενα

You see what is wrong with you? You use ἀλεκτρύων [M/F] to refer to the female [F] and the male [M] alike. (Ar., *Nub.* 662-3)

To resolve the referential or, if you like, sexual ambiguity of the word, Socrates offers a radical solution to the problem (of which only he is apparently aware) and on the spot creates the feminine ἀλεκτρύαινα ‘hen’, which he contrasts with the poetic masculine ἀλέκτωρ ‘cock’ (*Nub.* 666) to avoid the epicene ἀλεκτρύων. The otherwise unattested neologism ἀλεκτρύαινα is obviously formed on the analogy of other pairs referring to opposite sexes in the animal kingdom such as λέων ‘lion’ ~ λέαινα ‘lioness’, δράκων ‘snake’ ~ δράκαινα ‘she-snake’, λύκος ‘wolf’ ~ λύκαινα ‘she-wolf’, σκύλαξ ‘dog’ ~ σκυλάκαινα ‘bitch’.⁸ By doing so, the Aristophanic Socrates presents himself as a proponent of the principle that nouns referring to animate beings belonging to different sexes ought to be differentiated by different endings. Aristophanes, to be sure, used ἀλεκτρύων as a “properly epicene” noun according to Athenaeus (9.374c), who quotes him to illustrate the fact that in fifth-century Attic this was common usage:⁹

- (6a) ᾧδὸν μέγιστον τέτοκεν, ὡς ἀλεκτρύων

She’s laid a huge egg, like a cock. (Ar., fr. 193)

- (6b) πολλοὶ τῶν ἀλεκτρύωνων βία ὑπηνέμια τίκτουσιν ᾧὰ πολλάκις

It happens that many [F] cocks [M/F] by necessity lay wind-eggs. (Ar., fr. 194)

7 Ignoring the fact that fowls are not quadrupeds, as Wackernagel wittily remarks (1928: 1).

8 On the productivity and extension of the suffix see Chantraine: “le suffixe -αινα a pris en grec un développement nouveau, il a servi à désigner des animaux, surtout des animaux méprisés” (1933: 107). The oldest examples of the formation include δέσποινα ‘mistress’ ~ δεσπότης ‘master’ (etymologically of a ‘house’) and θέαινα in the formulaic verse κέκλυτέ μοι πάντες τε θεοὶ πᾶσαι τε θέαινα ‘hear me, all gods and all goddesses’ (*Il.* 19.101, *Od.* 8.5) and variations thereupon (*Il.* 8.20, *Od.* 8.341).

9 τὸν δ’ ἀλεκτρύονα ... οἱ ἀρχαῖοι καὶ θηλυκῶς εἰρήκασι ‘the ancients used the word ἀλεκτρύων also to refer to the hen’ (Athen. 9.373e).

The translation of (6a) and (6b) is Henderson's, who undoubtedly intended to emphasize Socrates' *ἀπορία* with the common noun *ἀλεκτρώων*, but the agreement of *πολλάι* in (6b) leaves no doubt about the sex of the fowl (as if laying eggs was not enough to convince anyone).¹⁰

The principle of correspondence between sex and gender is even more hilariously illustrated with Socrates' second rebuke of Strepsiades' lack of gender awareness. When the latter (correctly) uses the feminine article with a second-declension noun, i.e. *τὴν κάρδοπον* 'the trough' (*Nub.* 669), the former retorts that by doing so he is 'turning a feminine into a masculine noun' (*ἄρρενα καλεῖς θήλειαν οὔσαν*, *Nub.* 671). When Strepsiades asks him how on earth he managed to do that, Socrates replies: *ὥσπερ γε καὶ Κλεώνυμον* 'well, obviously, just like Cleonymus' (*Nub.* 673a), adding: *ταῦτὸν δύναταί σοι κάρδοπος Κλεωνύμῳ* 'clearly, *κάρδοπος* can be the same to you as *Κλεώνυμος*' (*Nub.* 674). This provokes an obscene wordplay on the part of Strepsiades (Janse forthcoming a), who asks how he should say the word correctly. Socrates' answer is again mind-boggling:

- (7) *τὴν καρδόπην, ὥσπερ καλεῖς τὴν Σωστράτη*
καρδόπη [F], just as you say *Σωστράτη* [F]. (*Ar.*, *Nub.* 678)

This is a remarkable innovation: instead of replacing the feminine article with its masculine equivalent (*τὸν κάρδοπον*), Socrates moves the noun to the first declension (*τὴν καρδόπην*) to align the grammatical gender of the noun, indicated by the agreement of the article, with its dedicated inflectional class. Strepsiades is again unable to distinguish biological sex from grammatical gender and thus fails to understand why a trough should be 'female' (*τὴν καρδόπην θήλειαν*; *Nub.* 679a). When Socrates reassures him that he has it right now (*ὀρθῶς γὰρ λέγεις*; 679b), Strepsiades confidently repeats what he thinks he has just learned:¹¹

- (8) *ἐκείνο δύναμαι· καρδόπη, Κλεωνύμη*
 That I can handle: *καρδόπη* [F], *Κλεωνύμη* [F]. (*Ar.*, *Nub.* 680)

The point of Socrates' digression is that nouns belonging to the second declension should be masculine and those belonging to the first declension

10 Strepsiades, to be sure, learned his lesson well when he enlightens Phidippides not to use the epicene noun *ἀλεκτρώων* to refer to both sexes, but to call the masculine fowl *ἀλέκτωρ* and the feminine *ἀλεκτράαινα* (850-1).

11 Strepsiades later uses his newly acquired knowledge to put off his first creditor: *οὐκ ἂν ἀποδοίην οὐδ' ἂν ὀβολὸν οὐδενί | ὅστις καλέσειε κάρδοπον τὴν καρδόπην* 'I wouldn't repay not even an obol to anyone | who calls the trough *κάρδοπος*' (*Nub.* 1250-1).

feminine—whether naturally (φύσει), conventionally (θέσει), or both.¹² Socrates clearly treats Σωστράτη as a feminine noun referring to a female person,¹³ but Strepsiades apparently understands Σωστράτη as a feminine noun referring to an effeminate male, hence his reassignment of Κλεώνυμος to the first declension.¹⁴ Apart from male-female doublets in personal names belonging to the second and first declension respectively, there are of course many doublets in nouns, e.g. κόρος ‘boy’ ~ κόρη ‘girl’, δούλος ‘slave’ [M] ~ δούλη ‘slave’ [F], θεός ‘god’ ~ θεά ‘goddess’, etc.—not to mention the very common first and second-declension adjectives like καλός ~ καλή.

It seems therefore quite reasonable for Socrates to fix, so to speak, the oddity of second-declension nouns triggering grammatical agreement patterns on articles and adjectives usually reserved for first-declension nouns. As a matter of fact, many grammatically feminine second-declension nouns have been “repaired” in the course of time, either by imposing masculine agreement patterns on them or by moving them to the first declension (Jannaris 1897: 111-2). A well-known example, discussed by Wackernagel (1928: 3) in terms of analogy and more recently by Coker (2009: 40-2) in terms of category formation, is ἡ ἄσβολος ‘soot’ [F], which appears as ἡ ἀσβόλη in Semonides (fr. 7.61 West) but as ὁ ἄσβολος in Hipponax (fr. 138 West) according to Phrynichus (*Praep. soph.* 28.1 Borries),¹⁵ both variants condemned by Photius.¹⁶

4. LIKE A VIRGIN

A remarkably persistent feminine second-declension noun is ἡ παρθένος, the etymology of which is “enigmatique” in the words of Chantraine (1968-80: 858).¹⁷ Its original meaning seems to be ‘maiden’, the semantic narrowing to ‘virgin’ being secondary, as unmarried girls were not supposed to have babies (Janse forthcoming c).¹⁸ This appears to be the gist of the words of the chorus leader in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*:

12 On the use of θέσει instead of νόμῳ with regard to words see now Ebbesen (2019).

13 The name is very common (LGNP online lists 52 occurrences from Attica alone) and used three times by Aristophanes in other comedies (*Eccl.* 41, *Thesm.* 375, *Vesp.* 1397); cf. Dover (1968: 183), Sommerstein (1991: 197), Kanavou (2011: 150).

14 The ‘transgendered’ Σωστράτη and Κλεωνύμη are discussed in more detail in Janse (forthcoming b).

15 Note that both wrote in Ionic – Semonides in the seventh, Hipponax in the late sixth century BC.

16 Ἄσβολος θηλυκῶς ἡ ἀσβολος, οὐχὶ ἡ ἀσβόλη, οὐδὲ ἀρσενικῶς ὁ ἄσβολος (Phot., *Lex.* 2946 Theodoridis).

17 Beekes (2010: 1153) accepts the etymology proposed by Klingenschmitt (1974): **pr-steno*- ‘with protruding breasts’.

18 It is noteworthy that the primary meaning of παρθένος in the documentary evidence of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods is the age class of girls (Chaniotis 2016).

- (9) κάγω, παρθένος γὰρ ἔτ' ἢ κοῦκ ἐξῆν πῶ μοι τεκεῖν | ἐξέθηκα, παῖς δ' ἑτέρα τις λαβοῦσ' ἀνείλετο
and I, being still an unmarried maiden and not allowed to give birth, exposed [the child], and some other girl took it up and adopted it. (Ar., *Nub.* 530-1)

It is clear that the *male (sic)* chorus leader “speaks of himself metaphorically as an unmarried girl who had a baby and (in accordance with a common Greek custom) left it to die in the open country”, in the words of Dover, who astutely adds that παρθένος is here “not a biological term, ‘virgin’, but a social term, ‘unmarried’” (1968: 167).¹⁹ The original meaning is borne out by the juxtaposition of παρθένος and παῖς δ' ἑτέρα τις ‘some *other* girl’ (*Nub.* 531). The fact that the word can be combined with other nouns seems to indicate that it was originally an adjective, e.g. γυναῖκα | παρθένον (Hes., *Theog.* 513-4), θυγάτηρ παρθένος (Xen., *Cyr.* 4.6.9).²⁰ The meaning ‘maiden’ also underlies the use of παρθένος in connection with ἡίθεος in Homer:²¹

- (10a) παρθένος ἡίθεός τ' ὀαρίζετον ἀλλήλοισιν
Maiden and youth both chat with each other. (Hom., *Il.* 22.128)

- (10b) παρθενικαὶ δὲ καὶ ἡίθειοι ἀταλὰ φρονέοντες
Maidens and youth thinking innocent thoughts. (Hom., *Il.* 18.567)

The clearly archaic and poetic word ἡίθεος can be reconstructed as *ἡίθεφος, which is presumably related to Proto-Indo-European **h₁uid^heu-* ‘unmarried’. It is thus cognate with Sanskrit विधवा *vidhāvā*, Old Church Slavonic вѣдова *vŭdova*, Latin *uidua*, Old Irish *fedh*, Welsh *gweddw*, Gothic 𐌿𐌺𐌿𐌶𐌿 *widuwō* and Old English *widuwe*, all meaning ‘widow’. Chantraine questions the traditional etymologie: “il est difficile de tirer le nom du jeune homme non marié de celui de la veuve” (1968-80: 408), but Beekes connects the meanings ‘widowed’ and ‘unmarried’ (2010: 512) and concludes that it was originally an adjective (1992: 178).²²

It may be noted that Latin *uidua* is not only used to refer to a widow,²³ but also to an unmarried woman, notably in Tullia’s urge to her husband Tarquinius Superbus, Rome’s last king: *se rectius uiduam et illum caelibem futurum fuisse contendere* ‘that it would have been juster for her to be unmarried and for

19 Cf. Sommerstein (1982: 187), Henderson (1998: 83), *pace* Sissa (1990: 86).

20 If Klingenschmitt’s (1974) etymology is correct, παρθένος is originally a compound adjective, which would explain the fact that it is a second-declension adjective of two endings.

21 Cf. Hdt. 3.49.15-6.

22 A more detailed explanation is given in Beekes (1992).

23 As in Palinurus’ warning to Phaedromus: *dum abstineas nupta, uidua, uirgine ... ama quid lubet* ‘as long as you stay away from a married woman, a widow, a virgin ... love whatever you like’ (Plaut., *Curculio* 1.1.37).

him to be single' (Liv. 1.46.7). The juxtaposition of *uidua* with *caelebs* is very instructive, as the latter is also used to refer to a person who is single "through being unmarried, widowed, or divorced" (OLD, s.v.). Perhaps even more instructive is the following line from Propertius' tirade against Isis, where *uidua* is combined with *puella*: *quidue tibi prodest uiduas dormire puellas?* 'or what's in it for you that girls should sleep without men?' (Prop. 2.33.17). Finally, it should be noted that the adjective *uiduus* is also used to refer to men without women, e.g. *iuuit uiduos rapta Sabina uiros* 'the rape of the Sabine women aided the wifeless men' (Ov., *Ars* 1.102).

Its Greek equivalent is also occasionally used in combination with feminine nouns referring to female persons, e.g. κόρη ἥθεος 'unmarried girl' (Eup., fr. 362 Kassel-Austin = 332 Kock).²⁴ The *Etymologicum Magnum* has an interesting comment on Eupolis' use of ἥθεος:

- (11) ἥθεος· ὁ ἄπειρος γάμου νέος. σπανίως δὲ ἐπὶ παρθένου, ὡς παρ' Εὐπολι
ἥθεος: a youth inexperienced in sex; rarely in reference to a παρθένος, as in
Eupolis. (*EM* 422.40-3 Gaisford)

This brings us back to παρθένος 'maiden' as a social term in the sense of 'unmarried girl' (cf. supra). The use of the phrase οὐκ ἐξῆν πῶ μοι τεκεῖν by the chorus leader in (9) indicates that a respectable παρθένος should not have children, but if she did, she could still be called a παρθένος. The interpretation of παρθένος as 'virgin' constitutes therefore a secondary semantic narrowing, based on the premise that "the categories of virgins and unmarried women were ideally identical" (Ogden 1996: 107¹⁴⁰). For this reason it was assumed to be part of the αἰδώς of a παρθένος not to engage in sexual relations before marriage. This emerges clearly from the epic formula παρθένος αἰδοίη 'respectable maiden' in reference to Astyoche, who was still an unmarried girl when she was impregnated by Ares in her father's house (*Il.* 2.514). The same formula is used in reference to newly created Pandora by Hesiod (*Theog.* 571, *Op.* 70). In Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, Deianeira "contrasts her own anxieties as a married woman with the peace and freedom of a young girl before marriage" (Easterling 1982: 93), until she is called 'a wife instead of a maiden' (ἀντὶ παρθένου γυνῆ, *Tr.* 148). The latter is nevertheless described as living 'a carefree life in the midst of pleasures' (ἡδοναῖς ἀμοχθον βίον, *Tr.* 147). Such "pleasures" could include sex with a married man, because Heracles refers to Iole as 'the unmarried daughter of Eurytus' (τὴν Εὐρυτεῖαν παρθένον, *Tr.* 1220), who he has nevertheless slept with him (τοῖς ἐμοῖς πλευροῖς ὁμοῦ κλιθεῖσαν, *Tr.* 1225-6).²⁵

²⁴ Plato uses ἥθεος even in reference to animals in the sense of 'unmated' (*Leg.* 840d).

²⁵ Hyllus is understandably scandalized by his father's wish that he should marry her (μηδ' ἄλλος ἀνδρῶν ... αὐτὴν ἀντὶ σοῦ λάβῃ ποτέ, *Tr.* 1225-6).

The idea that a maiden should ideally remain a virgin until she becomes a wedded wife (γυνή) gave rise to the semantic narrowing of παρθένος.²⁶ Compare, for instance, the definition of γυνή and παρθένος by Ptolemy of Ascalon:

- (12) γυνή παρθένου διαφέρει· γυνή μὲν γὰρ καλεῖται κυρίως ἡ ἤδη ἀνδρὸς πεῖραν εἰληφυῖα, παρθένος δὲ ἡ μήπω μνηθεῖσά ποτε ἀνδρὸς
 γυνή is different from παρθένος; γυνή is generally the word for a woman who has had sexual experience with a man, παρθένος for a woman who has not yet been initiated by a man. (Ptol. 61 Palmieri)

Pollux' definition of the verbs διακορεύω and διαπαρθενεύω, both meaning 'deflower', implies the idea of virginity as well:

- (13) τὸ δὲ τῆς παρθένου παρθενίαν ἀφελέσθαι
 To take away a maiden's virginity. (Poll., *Onom.* 3.42 Bethe)

In the Judeo-Christian context, it is of course the virgin birth of Jesus that gave rise to the generalization of the sense 'virgin'. According to the Gospel of Luke, Mary is described as παρθένον ἐμνηστευμένην ἀνδρὶ 'a maiden / virgin engaged to a man' (Lc. 1.27). When the angel Gabriel announces that she will get pregnant, she asks how this could possibly be, since she does not 'know a man', i.e. carnally (ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω, Lc. 1.34).²⁷ Mary's fiancé Joseph is of course, technically speaking, a man, but in Matthew's version of the story it is made clear that 'he took her as his wife and did not get to know her [carnally] until she had borne a son' (παρέλαβεν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐ ἐγένωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν, Mt. 1.25). John Chrysostom is therefore justified to ask the question that must have been on many people's lips:

- (14a) πῶς τίκτει ἡ Παρθένος καὶ μένει παρθένος;
 How is it possible that the Virgin gives birth and remains a virgin?
 (*Hom. in Mt.* 4.6 Field)

He could and should perhaps also have asked:²⁸

²⁶ For a very thorough discussion of the Greek concept of "virginity" see Sissa (1990).

²⁷ Compare the description of Isaac's future wife Rebecca: παρθένος ἦν, ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἔγνω αὐτήν (*Gen.* 24.16), where παρθένος translates the Hebrew נָרְיָהּ *bəṭūlāh*.

²⁸ Clement of Alexandria gave of course the only possible answer: μία δὲ μόνη γίνεται μήτηρ παρθένος 'only one woman becomes a virgin mother' (*Paed.* 1.6.42.1). A longer discussion is given by Gregory of Nyssa (*Or. dom.* = PG 1136.15 Migne).

(14b) πῶς γαμεῖται ἡ Παρθένος καὶ μένει παρθένος;

How is it possible that the Virgin gets married and remains a virgin?

Even though the mystery surrounding Mary's virginity remained, there was no doubt about her sex nor about her parental or, indeed, her marital status. It is therefore surprising that παρθένος remained a second-declension noun in the vast majority of the early Christian writers. Coker invokes "its religious significance" (2009: 51) to explain the overwhelming frequency of the second-declension noun (2009: 49, tab. 6) as opposed to its meagerly attested first-declension alternative. Coker found nine dated examples of παρθένα instead of παρθένος in the TLG, six plural and three singular. The plural examples obviously do not refer to the Virgin Mary, a rather important fact which has escaped Coker's attention, but the (two, not three) singular examples do and this is of course noteworthy. The first example is taken from the *Catena* on the Epistle to the Hebrews and is very remarkable, as both the second- and the first-declension noun are used in the same text, which is dated to the fifth (!) century:

(15a) γέγονεν υἱὸς Δαυίδ, σῶμα λαβὼν ἐκ τῆς ἁγίας παρθένου

He was born a son of David, receiving his body from the Holy Virgin.

(138.9-10 Kramer)

(15b) τὸν ... διὰ τῆς ἁγίας παρθένας γεγεννημένον

He who is born through the Holy Virgin. (138.16 Kramer)

The second example is found in the Late Byzantine *Etymologicum Gudianum*, where the legal status of children is discussed and παρθένιος is one of the terms to refer to illegitimate children:

(16) παρθένιος δὲ ὁ ἐκ τῆς παρθένας ἔτι νομιζομένης γεννώμενος

παρθένιος refers to the son born from a woman who is considered to be a virgin (?) (EG 410.34 Sturz)

In Modern Greek, παρθένος has become a masculine second-declension noun used to refer to male virgins,²⁹ as opposed to the feminine noun παρθένα used to refer to a female virgin, including the Virgin Mary, e.g. in the invocation Παναγία μου Παρθένα or more colloquially, with a hypocristic term of endearment, Παναγίτσα μου Παρθένα—but the old epicine form continues to

29 The masculine παρθένος was already used in the New Testament book of Revelation to refer to men 'who were not defiled [sic] by women' (οἱ μετὰ γυναικῶν οὐκ ἐμολύνθησαν, *Αποκ.* 14.4).

be used as well, though not in combination with a hypocoristic: *Παναγίτσα / Παναγία μου Παρθένε.

5. BOYS AND GIRLS

Probably the most remarkable clashes between biological sex and grammatical gender occur in the category of diminutives referring to animate, particularly human beings. (Pseudo) Hippocrates famously distinguished the following age classes in the life cycle of men:³⁰

- (17) **παιδίον** μὲν ἔστιν ἄχρις ἑπτὰ ἐτέων ὀδόντων ἐκβολῆς· **παῖς** δ' ἄχρι γονῆς ἐκφύσιος, ἔς τὰ δις ἑπτὰ· **μειράκιον** δ' ἄχρι γενείου λαχνώσιος, ἔς τὰ τρις ἑπτὰ· **νεανίσκος** δ' ἄχρις αὐξήσιος ὅλου τοῦ σώματος, ἔς τὰ τετράκις ἑπτὰ· **ἀνὴρ** δ' ἄχρις ἐνὸς δέοντος ἐτέων πεντήκοντα, ἔς τὰ ἑπτάκις ἑπτὰ· **πρεσβύτης** δ' ἄχρι πεντήκοντα ἕξ, ἔς τὰ ἑπτάκις ὀκτώ· τὸ δ' ἐντεῦθεν **γέρων**

He is *παιδίον* until he is seven years, i.e. until the shedding of teeth; *παῖς* until puberty, i.e. two times seven; *μειράκιον* until his beard begins to grow, i.e. three times seven; *νεανίσκος* until the completion of the body's growth, i.e. four times seven; *ἀνὴρ* until his forty-ninth year, i.e. seven times seven; *πρεσβύτης* until fifty-six, i.e. eight times seven; and after that he is *γέρων*.

(Sept. 5 Roscher)

There are, of course, more words to refer to male persons of different age classes. Probably the longest and most detailed list is given by Ptolemy of Ascalon:

- (18) **βρέφος** μὲν γάρ ἔστιν τὸ γεννηθὲν εὐθέως, **παιδίον** δὲ τὸ τρεφόμενον ὑπὸ τῆς τιθηνοῦ, **παιδάριον** δὲ τὸ ἤδη περιπατοῦν καὶ τῆς λέξεως ἀντεχόμενον, **παιδίσκος** δὲ ὁ ἐν τῇ ἐχομένῃ ἡλικίᾳ, **παῖς** δὲ ὁ διὰ τῶν ἐγκυκλίων μαθημάτων ἐρχόμενος, τὸν δὲ ἐχόμενον οἱ μὲν **πάλληκα**, οἱ δὲ **βούπαιδα**, οἱ δὲ **ἀντίπαιδα**, οἱ δὲ **μελλέφηβον**· ὁ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα **ἔφηβος**, ὁ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα **μειράκιον**, εἴτα **μειράξ**, εἴτα **νεανίσκος**, εἴτα **νεανίας**, εἴτα **ἀνὴρ** μέσος, εἴτα **προβεβηκώς**, ὃν καὶ **ῥωγέροντα** καλοῦσιν, εἴτα **γέρων**, εἴτα **πρεσβύτης**, εἴτα **ἐσχατόγηρος**

³⁰ The passage is quoted by several other authors: Ptolemy of Ascalon (*Diff. voc.* 61 Palmieri), Philo of Alexandria (*Op.* 105 Cohn), Pseudo-Iamblichus (*Theol. ar.* 55.14-56.7 de Falco), John of Damascus (*Sac. par.* = *PG* 95.1109.1-13 Migne). There were, of course, other divisions of the life cycle in Antiquity for which see, e.g. Overstreet (2009), Laes & Strubbe (2014: 23-9), Kosior (2016) and for the stages of childhood in particular Beaumont (2012: 17-24), Golden (2015: 10-9).

βρέφος is the newborn, παιδίον the child fed by the nurse, παιδάριον the child which is already walking and learning to talk, παιδίσκος the one in the next age class, παῖς the one who is following general education, the next age class is called by some πάλληξ, by others βούπαις, ἀντίπαις or μελλέφηβος, the one after that ἔφηβος, the one after that μειράκιον, then μείραξ, then νεανίσκος, then νεανίας, then ἀνήρ μέσος, then προβεβηκώς, who is also called ὠμογέρων, then γέρων, then πρεσβύτης, then ἐσχατόγηρως

(Ptol. 403.26-404.6 Palmieri)

It is possible that Ptolemy really believed that these words could and would be properly distinguished by some, but it seems more likely that the author of a treatise entitled *περὶ διαφορᾶς λέξεων* was a bit obsessed with finding distinctions too subtle to be detected, let alone applied, by ordinary mortals. Homer, for instance, combines *νεηνίης* with *ἀνήρ* (*Od.* 10.278, 14.523), Herodotus with *παῖς* (1.61, 7.99, 9.111). The latter uses both *νεηνίης* and *νεηνίσκος* to refer to Periander's son Lycophron (3.53), who is said to be seventeen years old (3.50). A young man who accidentally killed a boy (*παῖς*) with a javelin in the gymnasium is referred to as *μειράκιον* throughout Antiphon's second tetralogy, but in the defendant's second speech as *νεανίσκος* (3.4.6) as well as *μειράκιον* (3.4.4, 3.4.5, 3.4.8). In Plato's *Phaedo*, Socrates' children are referred to as τὰ παιδιά, with an additional specification: δύο γὰρ αὐτῷ υἱεῖς μικροὶ ἦσαν, εἷς δὲ μέγας 'for he had two younger sons and one older one' (*Phaed.* 116b). In the *Apology*, Socrates mentions his sons (υἱεῖς γε) again: εἷς μὲν μειράκιον ἤδη, δύο δὲ παιδιά 'one already a young man, two still boys' (*Ap.* 34d). In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, on the other hand, Socrates' eldest son is referred to as *νεανίσκος* (*Mem.* 2.2.1).

Some of the words listed by Ptolemy have feminine doublets which are derived from the same stem: *παιδίσκος* ~ *παιδίσκη*, *νεανίσκος* ~ *νεανίσκη*, *μειρακίσκος* ~ *μειρακίσκη*,³¹ *νεανίας* ~ *νεάνις*, *πρεσβύτης* ~ *πρεσβῦτις*.³² The word *ἔφηβος*, originally a second-declension adjective of two endings referring to the age class of ἥβη 'adolescence',³³ hence theoretically applicable to adolescent boys and girls alike,³⁴ came to be used in fourth-century Athens as a legal term for boys who entered a two-year period of military training in their eighteenth year (*Arist., Ath.* 42).³⁵ In reference to adolescent girls the now common noun *ἔφηβος* is found from the sixth century onwards, and again in

31 On the positive and negative connotations of diminutive nouns in *-ίσκος* / *-ίσκη* referring to persons see Chantraine (1933: 408-9).

32 The details of the relationship between the obvious cognates *γέρων* and *γραῦς* / *γραῖα* are disputed, cf. Chantraine (1968-80: 235), Beekes (2010: 285).

33 Compare the phrase *ἐφ' ἥβης* (*Ar., Eq.* 524).

34 Compare the expression *ἐς ἥβην ἦλθεν ὠραίαν γάμων* 'she came to the marriagable age' (*Eur., Hel.* 12).

35 For a recent assessment of the Athenian *ephebeia* in the fourth century see Friend (2019).

a legal context. In his paraphrase of the Justinian Code, Theophilus Antecessor, for instance, mentions οἱ ἄρρενες ἔτι δὲ καὶ αἱ θήλειαι ἔφηβοι ‘the male and also the female adolescents’ who are under the guardianship of a *curator* (κουρατωρεύονται) until they are old enough (at the age of twenty-five) to manage their property (*Par. inst.* 1.23.7-10). In the ninth-century successor to the Justinian Code, the so-called *Basilika*, ἔφηβος is used in combination with παρθένος (*Bas.* 2.2.12), θυγάτηρ (39.1.41) and κόραι (*Scholia in Bas. I-XI* 60.37.78.3). In Modern Greek, ἔφηβος is still being used as a common noun in high-register scientific jargon, but colloquially ο ἔφηβος now has a feminine counterpart: ἡ ἔφηβη.

The common noun παῖς is much more interesting for our purpose. Homer uses παῖς to refer to children of either sex and of any age. The wives and children left behind at home are referred to as παίδων ἢ δ’ ἀλόχων ‘children and wives’ by Nestor (*Il.* 15.662), ἡμέτερά τ’ ἄλοχοι καὶ νήπια τέκνα ‘our wives and infant children’ by Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.136),³⁶ and Odysseus compares the Greeks ‘wailing to each other to return home’ (ἀλλήλοισιν ὀδύρονται οἰκόνδε νέεσθαι, *Il.* 2.290) to παῖδες νεαροὶ χηραὶ τε γυναῖκες ‘little children and widowed women’ (*Il.* 2.289). The sex of the children is not specified in these cases: both νήπια τέκνα (grammatically neuter) and παῖδες νεαροὶ (grammatically masculine) refer to infants in general, whether male or female. Astyanax, on the other hand, is referred to as νήπιον υἱόν ‘infant son’ (*Il.* 6.366, 6.400), παῖδά τε νηπίαχον ‘infant son’ (*Il.* 6.400), τόνδε ... παῖδ’ ἐμόν ‘this here son of mine’ (*Il.* 6.476-7) and τὸν ῥ’ Ἔκτωρ καλέεσκε Σκαμάνδριον ‘him Hector used to call Scamandrius’ (*Il.* 6.402), where the masculine agreement patterns are triggered by the sex of the boy. When παῖς is used to refer to daughters, it triggers feminine agreement patterns, e.g. παῖδα φίλον (*Il.* 16.459), παῖδ’ ἐμόν (*Il.* 6.479) versus παῖδα φίλην (*Il.* 1.446), παῖδά τ’ ἐμήν (*Od.* 4.262).

In many cases, however, παῖς is lexically opposed to its female counterpart, as in Eumaeus’ account of the fate of Odysseus’ parents (*Od.* 15.351-79). Laertes ‘is grieving for his absent son’ (παιδὸς ὀδύρεται οἰχομένοιο, 15.355), but Anticlea ‘has died of grief for her glorious son’ (ἄχει οὐ παιδὸς ἀπέφθιτο κυδαλίμοιο, 15.358), after having brought up Eumaeus together with his sister Ctimene, of whom he says:

(19) **θυγατέρ’** ἰφθίμη, τὴν ὀπλοτάτην τέκε **παίδων**

Her stately daughter [F], whom she bore as the youngest of her children [M/F].

(Hom., *Od.* 15.364)

³⁶ For recent discussion of this particular line see Janse (2021).

It is clear that *παίδων* is here used generically in reference to both Odysseus and Ctímene,³⁷ the latter being identified as *θυγατέρι* ‘daughter’ (15.364) as opposed to Odysseus, who is twice referred to as *παιδός* ‘son’ (355, 358).

Example (19) leads me to a minor digression on the use of *ἴφθιμος*, an adjective with uncertain meaning and unknown etymology.³⁸ In the example just quoted *ἴφθιμη* agrees with *θυγατέρι* (cf. *Od.* 10.106, 15.364), is it does elsewhere: *ἴφθιμη ἄλοχος* ‘stately wife’ (*Il.* 5.415, cf. *Il.* 19.116, *Od.* 12.452), *ἴφθιμη παράκοιτις* ‘stately wife’ (*Od.* 23.92), *ἴφθιμη βασίλεια* ‘stately queen’ (*Od.* 16.332), *ἴφθιμην Πηρώ* ‘stately Pero’ (*Od.* 11.287). These are all feminine nouns referring to female humans, but in two cases *ἴφθιμος* does not agree with feminine nouns referring to inanimate *σκευή*, to borrow Protagoras’ term quoted in (1). The first example occurs in the beginning of the *Iliad*:

(20a) πολλὰς δ’ ἴφθιμοὺς ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν | ἥρώων

Many [F] valiant [M/F] souls [F] he sent down to Hades, of heroes.

(Hom., *Il.* 1.3-4)

It might be argued that *ψυχή* is here used metonymically to refer to the soul as a person, as in *μία τὰς πολλὰς, τὰς πάνυ πολλὰς | ψυχὰς ὀλέσασ’ ὑπὸ Τροίᾳ* ‘who alone destroyed many, very many souls under Troy’ (Aesch., *Ag.* 1456-7, cf. 1465-6), *ψυχὰς δὲ πολλὰς κάγαθαὺς ἀπώλεσας* ‘who destroyed many and excellent souls’ (Eur., *Andr.* 611), *ψυχαὶ δὲ πολλαὶ δι’ ἔμ’ ἐπὶ Σκαμανδρίοις | ῥοαῖσιν ἔθανον* ‘many souls died on my account by the streams of Scamander’ (Eur., *Hel.* 52-3, quoted in Ar., *Thesm.* 864-5). Homer, however, uses *ψυχή* to refer to the souls of the dead:³⁹

(21) ἔνθα δὲ πολλὰι | ψυχαὶ ἐλεύσονται νεκῶν κατατεθνηώτων

There many souls of the dead who have died will come forth.

(Hom., *Od.* 10.529-30)

The second example from Homer’s *Iliad* is a variant of the first:

37 It may be noted that the superlative *ὀπλοτάτην* instead of the metrically equivalent ‘binary’ comparative *ὀπλοτέρην* suggests that Laertes and Anticlea had more than two children.

38 Cf. Chantraine (1968-80: 473), Beekes (2010: 606).

39 Latacz et al. believe that “die *ψυχαὶ* sind als Teile von Lebenden vorgestellt; *ψυχή* hat im fgrE nur hier ein adj. Attribut: ‘starke’ eigtl. zu ‘Heroen’ (*Enallage*). *ψυχαὶ* verschmilzt mit *ἥρώων* zu einem Gesamtbegriff (etwa ‘Heroenleben’, ‘Heroen-Existenzen’)” (2000: 17). Apart from the fact that this explanation ignores the fact that *ἥρώων* is added in enjambement, which precludes any “Verschmelzung” with *ψυχαὶ*, the authors take pains to explain the difference between *ψυχὰς* at *Il.* 1.3 (20a) and *κεφαλὰς* at *Il.* 11.55 (20b): “*κεφαλὴ* [bewährt] bei Homer durchgängig seinen Körperteilcharakter ... und [könnte] daher niemals, wie *ψυχή*, in Gegensatz zu *αὐτός* treten ..., das das ganze des Körpers (mit Kopf) bezeichnet” (ibid.).

(20b) ἔμελλε | πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους κεφαλὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαπειν

He was about to send many [F] valiant [M/F] heads [F] down to Hades.

(Hom., *Il.* 11.54-5)

Liddell and Scott's remark that "Hom. uses ἰφθίμη of women; but ἰφθίμοι ψυχὰι, κεφαλὰι, speaking of men" (LSJ, s.v. ἰφθίμος) is echoed by Montanari: "Hom. -η referring to women; -ος with fem. nouns speaking of men" (2015: 995). It is tempting to accept this explanation for an apparent mismatch in natural and grammatical gender agreement, but one is left wondering why πολλὰς [F] should be left out of the game, when πολλοὺς [F] would have been a viable and metrically equivalent alternative. Alternatively, it has been argued that ἰφθίμος is a second-declension adjective of two endings, except "bei Frauen" (Schwyzer 1950: 32).

Returning to the use of παῖς in reference to sons, it is clear that the plural may be used to refer to male and not to female children, as when Hector is met with "the womenfolk at large" (Kirk 1990: 155) at the Scaean gates:

(22) ἄμφ' ἄρα μιν Τρώων ἄλοχοι θεόν ἠδὲ **θύγατρας** | εἰρόμεναι **παῖδας** τε
 κασιγνήτους τε ἕτας τε | καὶ πόσιας

Around him the wives and daughters of the Trojans came running asking about their sons and brothers and relatives and husbands. (Hom., *Il.* 6.238-40)

Here, as in the case of (19), the daughters are referred to by θύγατρας, the sons by παῖδας, but the identification of the latter can only be deduced from the context: the men return from the battlefield and the women are anxious to know if they are still alive. Shortly thereafter the sleeping quarters of Priam's children in his palace are described:

(23) ἔνθα δὲ **παῖδες** | κοιμῶντο Πριάμοιο **παρὰ μνηστῆς ἀλόχοισι**

There the sons of Priam slept besides their wedded wives. (Hom., *Il.* 6.245-6)

Again the identification of παῖδες as 'sons' is made possible by their conjunction with their wives and the mention of Priam's daughters in the following line (κουράων δέ, *Il.* 6.247). Herodotus relates how the Hyperborean maidens (referred to as κόρας at 4.33 and παρθένοισι at 4.34) who had come to Delos to bring offering but had died there, were honoured by the Delians: κείρονται καὶ αἱ κόραι καὶ οἱ παῖδες οἱ Δηλίων 'both the girls and the boys cut their hair', sc. in honour of the maidens (4.34).

In other cases, the sex of the children is revealed by the addition of the adjectives ἄρσιν / ἄρρην and θηλύς, e.g. παῖδες ἄρρενες καὶ θήλειαι 'male

and female children' (Plat., *Leg.* 788a), παῖδας θηλείας τε καὶ ἄρρενας 'children, female as well as male' (*Leg.* 930b), παῖδας θηλείας 'female children' (*Leg.* 924e), στῦλοι γὰρ οἴκων παῖδες εἰσιν ἄρσενες 'for the pillars of a house are the male children' (Eur., *I.T.* 57). Even in cases where παῖς is used in conjunction with θυγάτηρ, as in (22), ἄρσην is sometimes added for the sake of clarity, e.g. Ἄλεϖ ἄρσενες μὲν παῖδες ... θυγάτηρ δὲ ἐγένετο 'Aleus had male children ... and a daughter' (Hecataeus 1a.1F.29a Jacoby). Oedipus distinguishes among his children 'the males' from his 'little girls':

- (24) **παίδων δὲ τῶν μὲν ἀρσένων** μή μοι, Κρέων | προσθῆ μέριμναν· **ἄνδρες** εἰσίν, ὥστε μὴ σπάνιν ποτὲ σχεῖν, ἔνθ' ἂν ὦσι, τοῦ βίου· | **ταῖν δ' ἀθλίαιν οἰκτραῖν τε παρθένοι**ν ἐμαῖν ... ταῖν μοι μέλεσθαι

As to my children [M/F], about the males do not worry, Creon; they are men, so they will never lack, wherever they are, a means of living; but as for my two poor and pitiable little girls ... for them you must care!

(Soph., *O.T.* 1459-66)

Aristophanes uses an unusual combination to refer to a young girl. After stating that women have a fair share in the burdens of war, τεκοῦσαι | κάκπέμψασαι παῖδας ὀπλίτας 'giving birth to sons and sending them off as hoplites' (*Lys.* 588-9), Lysistrata says she is worried περὶ τῶν δὲ κορῶν ἐν τοῖς θαλάμοις γηρασκουσῶν 'about the girls growing old in their rooms' (*Lys.* 593), contrasting παῖδας 'boys' with κορῶν 'girls'. She complains that even a grey old man 'marries a child girl in no time': ταχὺ παῖδα κόρην γεγάμηκεν (*Lys.* 595).

Finally, there is of course the possibility of signalling the sex of the child by making articles or pronouns agree with the noun, as in Menander's *Epitrepontes*, where one of the girls (κόραις, *Epit.* 477) Habrotonon was invited to play for at the Tauropolia is later referred to as τὴν παῖδα (*Epit.* 480), ἐλευθέρα[ς] | παιδός 'of a freeborn mother' (*Epit.* 495-6). Smicrines' daughter is called παῖδ' ἐπίγαμον 'marriageable girl' (*Epit.* 1115) and referred back to by the demonstrative pronoun ταύτην (*Epit.* 1119).⁴⁰

6. BOYS WILL BE BOYS

Before turning to the diminutives of παῖς, I would like to present a remarkable difference in marking agreement with the neuter nouns τέκνον and τέκος, both meaning 'child', in Homer. The latter always triggers neuter agreement

40 Another example is αἱ παῖδες αὐταὶ 'those girls' (Strattis fr. 27 apud Athen. 589a). They are said to have come from Megara, but are in fact Corinthian, so it is unlikely that παῖδες is here used to refer to "slave girls".

with φίλος in the vocative φίλον τέκος ‘dear child’, whether it is used in reference to men (Achilles, *Il.* 9.437, 9.444; Hector, *Il.* 22.38, 24.373) or to women (Helen, *Il.* 3.162, 3.192; Aphrodite, *Il.* 5.373, 22.183; Athena, *Il.* 8.30; Leto, *Il.* 21.509). The former, however, seems to trigger masculine agreement in the vocative φίλε τέκνον in reference to men (Telemachus, *Od.* 2.363, 3.184, 15.125, 15.509). Hecabe addresses Hector first as τέκνον ἐμόν (*Il.* 22.82), with the expected neuter agreement, and then as φίλε τέκνον (22.84). Eurycleia, on the other hand, addresses Penelope once as φίλον τέκος (*Od.* 23.5) and once as τέκνον φίλον (*Od.* 23.26), both with the expected neuter agreement.

The diminutives of παῖς are either male (παιδίσκος) or female (παιδίσκη), but the most frequently used are neuter: τὸ παιδίον / τὸ παιδάριον. Looking at the respective positions of the neuter diminutives παιδίον and παιδάριον and the masculine nouns παιδίσκος and παῖς in Ptolemy of Ascalon’s division of age classes (18), one might be inclined to look for a correlation between grammatical and natural gender, but a παῖς is generally not deemed old enough to be able to engage in sex—as opposed to a μειράκιον, who is considered to be young enough to still go to school according to Aristophanes (*Nub.* 916-7) and old enough to have sexual relationships (*Pl.* 975-91). Although the sex of a παιδίον does not seem to matter a lot, it is sometimes explicitly identified, e.g. θηλύ παιδίον (Plut., *Pomp.* 53.4) versus ἄρρην παιδίον (Ar., *Lys.* 748b).⁴¹

There are many cases in which παῖς and παιδίον are used interchangeably to refer to the same child, e.g. τῷ ἄν οἴκη τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὸ παιδίον, τούτου παῖς νομίζεται ‘to whom of the men the παιδίον resembles, the παῖς is adjudged to be his’ (Hdt. 4.180).⁴² Aesop’s fable about the boy who went hunting for grasshoppers begins with παιδίον and ends with ὁ παῖς (9b Hausrath-Hunger). Socrates discusses Protagoras’ principle τὸ πάντων μέτρων ‘the measure of all things’ in reference to a παιδίον who is immediately thereafter referred to as τοῦ παιδός (Plat., *Theaet.* 168d).

There is, however, a very interesting and remarkable case of a mismatch between the grammatical and the natural gender of a baby in Menander’s *Epitrepontes*. The usual words to refer to the baby are παιδάριον (*Epit.* 245, 464, 473, 646, 986) and παιδίον (*Epit.* 266, 268, 269, 295, 302, 311, 354, 355, 403, 448, 533, 539, 569, 864, 896, 956, 1131).⁴³ Once the baby is addressed as ὦ φίλτατον τέκνον (*Epit.* 856). On three occasions, however, it is referred to as παῖς and identified as a boy. When Syrus reveals to Smicrines that the

41 In reference to the latter, Sommerstein suspects that “there may be a play on *sklēros* ‘hard’ which, in later Greek at any rate, could also mean ‘tough, virile’” (1982: 196).

42 The Ausoneans are said have μίξιν ἐπίκοινον ‘promiscuous sex’, οὔτε συνοικέοντες κτηνηδόν τε μισγόμενοι ‘without living together and mating like cattle’ (Hdt. 4.180). Here we have another example of an adjective which can be used in both a biological and grammatical sense, though I would hesitate to translate ἐπίκοινον γένος as ‘promiscuous gender’.

43 Παιδίον at *Epit.* 1076 refers to a male slave (cf. *παῖδες*, *Epit.* 1076-7).

shepherd found the baby (τὸ παιδίον, *Epit.* 295) with some jewelry, he presents him as if he is a young man:

- (25) αὐτὸς πάρεστιν οὐτοσί. [τὸ] πα[ιδί]ον δός μοι, γύναι· τὰ δέραια καὶ γνωρίσματα οὗτος σ' ἀπαιτεῖ, Δᾶ'· ἑαυτῷ φησι γὰρ ταῦτ' ἐπιτεθῆναι κόσμον, οὐ σοὶ διατροφήν

He [M] is here himself [M]. Give me the παιδίον [v], wife. The bracelet and the necklace, he [M] is here to claim them back, Daos. He says they were put there as ornament for himself [M], not as support for you! (*Men.*, *Epit.* 302-5)

The baby is anaphorically referred to by the demonstrative pronouns οὐτοσί and οὗτος.⁴⁴ The use of the masculine οὗτος instead of the neuter τοῦτο presents the infant as a young man who has the authority to claim the jewelry for himself. In other words, Syrus lets the baby speak on his own behalf, even though he identifies himself as its legal guardian (κύριος, *Epit.* 306). He then asks whether the gold trinkets should be kept τῷ παιδίῳ ... ἕως ἂν ἐκτραφῆ ‘for the child ... until he is grown up’ (*Epit.* 311), confirming its status as an infant. The demonstrative pronoun now used to refer back to the baby is not the masculine οὗτος, but the neuter τοῦτο (*Epit.* 314). Then, however, Syrus says the following:

- (26) ἴσως ἔσθ' ο[ὗτο]σί | ὁ πα[ί]ς ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς καὶ τραφεῖς ἐν ἐργάταις | ὑπερόψεται ταῦτ', εἰς δὲ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν | ἄξ[ι]ας ἐλεύθερόν τι τολμήσει πονεῖν, | θηρᾶν λέοντας, ὄπλα βαστάζειν, τρέχειν | ἐν ἀγῶσι

Maybe this boy [M] here is above our class and having been brought up [M] by working people, he may despise that, and when he is fully grown [M], he will want to try to engage in something fit for a freeman—hunting lions, bearing arms, running in competitions. (*Men.*, *Epit.* 320-25)

By using the masculine ο[ὗτο]σί ὁ πα[ί]ς, Syrus is again presenting the baby as a young adult freeman who has the right to self-determination. Finally, παῖς is used in the phrase χρήματ' ... ὀρφανοῦ | παιδός ‘the possessions ... of an orphan boy’ (*Epit.* 397-8), where the masculine noun is also used to emphasize the legal rights of the boy once he is an adult.⁴⁵

I would like to conclude with a brief discussion of the use of μεράκιον. In (Pseudo) Hippocrates’ division of age classes (17), μεράκιον is used to refer to an adolescent boy between fourteen and twenty-one years, i.e. between παῖς and νεανίσκος, the latter being a full-grown, but still young, man. Ptolemy of

44 On the anaphoric use of οὗτος see van Emde Boas et al., who suggests that “the use of οὗτος indicates that the speaker suggests some ‘distance’” (2019: 353), in the case of Syrus between himself and the child.

45 Παῖς also figures in a reconstructed line: Χα[ρ]ισίῳ παῖς γέγονεν ἐκ τῆς ψαλ[τ]ρίας; ‘The [harp-girl has borne] Cha[r]isius a son?’ (*Epit.* 621 Sandbach).

Ascalon, however, distinguishes *μειράκιον* from *μείραξ* in his division (18), which is remarkable as the same Ptolemy elsewhere distinguishes the two in the following way:

- (27) *μειράκιον* καὶ *μείραξ* διαφέρει· **μειράκιον** μὲν λέγεται ὁ ἄρσην, **μείραξ** δὲ ἡ θήλεια
 There is a difference between *μειράκιον* and *μείραξ*; the male is called *μειράκιον*, the female *μείραξ*. (Ptol. 94 Palmieri)

Moeris gives the following specification:

- (28) **μειράκια** τοὺς ἄρρενας Ἀττικοί· **μείρακας** τὰς θηλείας Ἑλληνας
 Attic writers call the males *μειράκιον*, Hellenistic writers call the females *μειράξ*. (Moer. 15 Hansen)

Given the obvious relationship between the two words, it seems surprising that the diminutive should be used to refer to male youths, whereas the base form from which it is derived is used to refer to female youths. Etymologically, *μείραξ* is related to Sanskrit मय्य *márya*- ‘young man, lover’ and मय्यक *maryaká*- ‘small man.’⁴⁶ The latter is a formation independent of *μείραξ*, but the former suggest that *μείραξ* itself was derived from an unattested **μείρος*, which would go back to Proto-Indo-European **mer-ǵo*- ‘young (girl or man)’ (Beekes 2010: 921). Chantraine (1933: 379) suggests that nouns in -αξ may have been originally adjectives, e.g. μύλος ‘mill’ → μύλαξ ‘millstone’, λίθος ‘stone’ → λίθαξ ‘stony’ as in λίθακι ποτὶ πέτρῃ ‘against the stony rock’ (Hom., *Od.* 5.415). Herodian says that *μείραξ*, -ἄκος is feminine by analogy with other words in -αξ with a short suffix vowel such as ἡ κλίμαξ, -ἄκος ‘ladder’, ἡ πίδαξ, -ἄκος ‘spring’ as opposed to masculine nouns with a long suffix vowel such as ὁ Φαίαξ, -ἄκος ‘Phaeacean’, ὁ θώραξ, -ἄκος ‘breast’ (Hdn. *GG* 3.2.631). However, animate nouns in -αξ are often common nouns, e.g. σκύλαξ ‘puppy’, δέλφαξ ‘swine’, σπάλαξ ‘mole rat’, so it is not inconceivable that *μείραξ* was originally a common noun as well. This would imply that the masculine use of *μείραξ* in “later writers” (LSJ) is not necessarily an innovation or an extension.⁴⁷

The use of *μείραξ* to refer to a male youth is found in the story of the seven Maccabean martyrs who were one by one tortured and killed by Antiochus

⁴⁶ Other cognates have been suggested, but rejected by Chantraine (1968-80: 678) and Beekes (2010: 921-2).

⁴⁷ In the *Aethiopica* of the Atticist novelist Heliodorus, for instance, ἡ *μείραξ* (4.19.4) is used alongside τὸν *μείρακα* (10.23.4) and οἱ σὺν αὐτῷ *μείρακες* (4.19.4). The use of the masculine ὁ *μείραξ* οὐμὸς φίλος ‘the laddie, my dear friend’ (*Sol.* 5.15) is ridiculed in Lucian’s *Soloeccista* by his “teacher” Socrates of Mopsus: λοιδορεῖς φίλον ὄντα; ‘so you insult your own friend?’ (*Sol.* 5.16), i.e. by calling him a *μείραξ* instead of a *μειράκιον*.

IV Epiphanes.⁴⁸ In the first version of the story, the third oldest is referred to as νεανίσκος (2 Macc. 7.12), the seventh and youngest as νεανίας (7.25, 7.30) and μειράκιον (7.25). In the second version, they are collectively called μειρακίσκοι (4 Macc. 8.1), μειράκια (8.14, 14.4), νεανίαι (8.5, 8.27, 14.9), νεανίσκοι (14.12) and even ἄνδρες (14.11), but also μείρακες (14.8) and οἱ ἱεροὶ μείρακες (14.6).⁴⁹

It is worthy of note that the Greek of 2 and 4 Maccabees is considered “literary and Atticistic” by Thackeray (1909: 13).⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, the distinction between μειράκιον / μειρακίσκος on the one hand and νεανίσκος / νεανίας on the other is as spurious as in other cases quoted earlier in reference to Ptolemy’s life cycle (18). Leaving aside μειρακίσκος and νεανίας, it is interesting to observe that both μειράκιον and νεανίσκος can be used to refer to “the junior partner in homosexual eros” (Dover 1989: 85). In Plato’s *Charmides*, Socrates says of the eponymous youth:

- (29) οὐ γάρ τι φαῦλος οὐδὲ τότε ἦν ἔτι παῖς ὢν, νῦν δ’ οἶμαί που εὖ μάλα ἂν ἦδη **μειράκιον** εἶη
He wasn’t plain [M] even then when he was [M] still a παῖς [M], but I suppose that he must be quite a μειράκιον [N] by now. (Plat., *Charm.* 154b)

Chaerephon replies:

- (30) αὐτίκα ... εἴσει καὶ ἡλίκος [M] καὶ οἶος [M] γέγονε
Immediately ... you will see how big and what kind of a person he has become. (Plat., *Charm.* 154b)

When Charmides enters the room, followed by a host of other lovers (πολλοὶ δὲ δὴ ἄλλοι ἐρασταί, 154c), Socrates consistently refers to him with masculine pronouns (ἐκεῖνος, 154b; αὐτόν, 154d), whereupon Chaerephon asks him:

- (31) τί σοι φαίνεται ὁ νεανίσκος;
What do you think of the νεανίσκος [M]? (Plat., *Charm.* 154d)

It appears that a sexually active μειράκιον can not only trigger male attention but masculine agreement patterns as well, despite the neuter gender of the noun. Νεανίσκος thus fits the natural gender better than μειράκιον.

48 Antiochus IV was the first of the Seleucids to persecute Jews, which resulted in the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BC).

49 The ‘holy youths’ (ἱεροὶ μείρακες) are later called οἱ ἑπτὰ Μακκαβαῖοι ‘the seven Maccabees’ by the Cappadocian Fathers, cf. Basil of Caesarea (*Const.* = PG 31.1385.45 Migne), Gregory of Nazianzus (*Or.* 43.74.2 Boulenger), Gregory of Nyssa (*Mart.* 2 = PG 46.785.39 Migne).

50 For a more detailed discussion see, e.g., deSilva (2006: xii).

Equally intriguing are the word choice and agreement patterns in reference to Cleinias in Plato's *Euthydemus*. At the very beginning of the dialogue, Crito introduces him as follows:⁵¹

- (32) ἐν μέσῳ δ' ὑμῶν τὸ Ἀξιόχου μειράκιον ἦν· καὶ μάλα πολὺ, ὧ Σώκρατες, ἐπιδεδωκέναι μοι ἔδοξεν καὶ τοῦ ἡμετέρου οὐ πολὺ τι τὴν ἡλικίαν διαφέρειν Κριτοβούλου· ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος μὲν σκληφρός, οὗτος δὲ προφερῆς καὶ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθὸς τὴν ὄψιν

Between you was the μειράκιον [N] of Axiochus; and he seemed to me to have grown up quite a bit and not to differ a lot in age from our Critobulus [M]; but whereas the latter [M] is puny [M], the former [M] is precocious [M] and handsome [M] and noble [M] in appearance. (Plat., *Euthyd.* 271b)

The masculine gender of the demonstrative pronoun οὗτος may have been triggered by that of ἐκεῖνος, which refers back to Κριτοβούλου, which is of course a masculine proper name, but it may equally well have been triggered by the fact that Cleinias is portrayed as being ahead of his age. He is nevertheless still referred to as τὸ μειράκιον by Socrates in his description of the same seating plan in which Cleinias was first identified by Crito (273b). Socrates agrees with Crito that Cleinias is well developed for his age (ὄν σὺ φῆς πολὺ ἐπιδεδωκέναι, 273a) and goes on to say that he was followed by a host of lovers (ἐρασταὶ πάνυ πολλοί, 273a), just as Charmides was described in his eponymous dialogue. In other words, the context is again erotically charged.

In the first eristic scene (272d-277c), Cleinias is first referred to as τουτονὶ τὸν νεανίσκον and immediately thereafter as τῷ μειρακίῳ τούτῳ (275a). The context is no longer erotically charged, as Socrates' purpose is to have Euthydemus and Dionysiodorus persuade Cleinias 'to ensue wisdom and practise virtue' (ὡς χρῆ φιλοσοφεῖν καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, 275b). He is twice characterized by Socrates as a νέος who is by his very nature susceptible to corruption (οἷον εἰκὸς περὶ νέω, 275b). He urges the two sophists to make trial τοῦ μειρακίου (275b) and they agree provided ὁ νεανίσκος (275c) is willing to answer their questions. Socrates continues his account as follows:

- (33) καὶ τὸ μειράκιον ... ἠρυθρίασέ τε καὶ ἀπορήσας ἔβλεπεν εἰς ἐμέ· καὶ ἐγὼ γνοὺς αὐτὸν τεθορυβημένον ... ἦν δ' ἐγὼ

And the μειράκιον [N] ... blushed and looked at me in bewilderment [M]; and I, perceiving that he [M] was totally at loss [M] ... I said.

(Plat., *Euthyd.* 275d)

51 I translate καλὸς as 'beautiful', following Dover (1989: 16).

Though a neuter noun, *μειράκιον* triggers masculine agreement patterns on the participle *ἀπορήσας* and the pronoun *αὐτόν*, which in its turns triggers masculine agreement on the participle *τεθορυβημένον*. It seems as if the youth is considered to be a (young) man of reason who is able to refute the sophists despite his *ἀπορία*, as is clear from Socrates' reassurance:

(34) θάρρει ... καὶ ἀπόκρινα **ἀνδρείως**, ὅπότερά σοι φαίνεται

Do not worry ... and answer *like a man*, whatever you think it is.

(Plat., *Euthyd.* 275d-e)

It is tempting to explain to masculine agreement pattern in (33) by the subsequent use of *ἀνδρείως* in (34), which Socrates apparently uses to convince Cleinias that he is a (young) man of independent thought. Dionysiodorus, however, is convinced that τὸ *μειράκιον* (275e) will be confuted, no matter what his answer will be, and Socrates knows he is unable to advise τῷ *μειρακίῳ* (276a), who continues to be referred to as τὸ *μειράκιον* in the ensuing interrogation (276b-d *ter*; 277b).

At the beginning of the first protreptic scene (227d-282e), as Euthydemus is about to press τὸν *νεανίσκον* (277d) for the third fall (*πάλαισμα*, as in a wrestling game), Socrates continues his account as follows:

(35) καὶ ἐγὼ γνοὺς **βαπτίζομενον τὸ μειράκιον**, βουλόμενος ἀναπαῦσαι αὐτό ... παραμυθούμενος εἶπον

And I, perceiving that the *μειράκιον* [N] was going under and wanting to give it [N] some breathing space ... encouraged him with these words.

(Plat., *Euthyd.* 277d)

All of a sudden, Cleinias is presented as a helpless little boy who is “getting into deep water” (LSJ) and this time τὸ *μειράκιον* triggers neuter agreement patterns on the participle *βαπτίζομενον*, here of course indistinguishable from its masculine equivalent, and the anaphoric pronoun *αὐτό*, as opposed to *αὐτόν* at 275d (33).⁵² The idea that Cleinias is too young to be able to tackle questions of such magnitude is later explicitly stated by Socrates, when he explains to the bewildered Cleinias that good fortune is not the greatest of all good things (τὸ μέγιστον τῶν ἀγαθῶν, 279c):

(36) ἡ σοφία δήπου ... εὐτυχία ἐστί· τοῦτο δὲ **κἂν παῖς** γνοίη

Wisdom surely ... is good fortune; *even a child* would see that.

(Plat., *Euth.* 279d)

⁵² Unsurprisingly, this minute detail of grammar has escaped the attention of serious commentators of the *Euthydemus* such as Gifford (1905).

The particle δήπου combines “the certainty of δή” with “the doubtfulness of που”, but “often the doubt is only assumed μετ’ εἰρωνίας” (Dover 1954: 267).⁵³ That this is certainly the case here appears from Socrates’ subsequent comment:

(37) καὶ ὅς ἐθαύμασεν· οὕτως ἔτι νέος τε καὶ εὐήθης ἔστι

And he wondered at this; he is *still so young and ignorant*. (Plat., *Euth.* 279d)

At the end of the first protreptic scene, Socrates urges Euthydemus and Dionysiodorus again to show Cleinias how “to ensue wisdom and practise virtue”:

(38) ἐπιδείξατον τῷ μειράκιῳ, πότερον πᾶσαν ἐπιστήμην δεῖ αὐτὸν κτᾶσθαι, ἢ ἔστι τις μία ἣν δεῖ λαβόντα εὐδαιμονεῖν τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα εἶναι, καὶ τίς αὕτη· ὡς γὰρ ἔλεγον ἀρχόμενος, περὶ πολλοῦ ἡμῖν τυγχάνει ὄν τόνδε τὸν νεανίσκον σοφὸν τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι

Show the μειράκιον [N] whether he [M] ought to acquire every kind of knowledge, or whether there is a single sort of it which he [M] must obtain if he [M] is to be both happy and a good man [M]. For as I was saying at the outset, it is really a matter of great importance to us that this νεανίσκος [M] here should become wise [M] and good [M]. (Plat., *Euth.* 282e)

In (38), τὸ μειράκιον triggers masculine agreement patterns on the anaphoric pronoun αὐτόν, as opposed to αὐτό at 277d (35), and on the participle λαβόντα, which suggests that Socrates is now treating Cleinias again as being *compos mentis* in that he assumes him to be capable of acquiring ἐπιστήμη to become a ‘good man’ (ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα). It seems as if the use of τόνδε τὸν νεανίσκον in the second part of Socrates’ statement is intended to suggest that he is actually a boy on the brink of manhood.

At the beginning of the second eristic scene (283a-288b), which immediately follows after (38) and basically reiterates what Socrates had said, Cleinias continues to be referred to as νεανίσκος (283a *ter*). He is turned back into a μειράκιον again, when Socrates allows the two sophists to apply their τέχνη (285b) ‘to make good and sensible people out of bad and senseless’ (ἐκ πονηρῶν τε καὶ ἀφρόνων χρηστούς τε καὶ ἔμφονας ποιεῖν, 285a):

(39) ἀπολεσάντων ἡμῖν τὸ μειράκιον καὶ φρόνιμον ποιησάντων

Let them destroy the μειράκιον for us and make him sensible.

(Plat., *Euth.* 285b)

53 Cf. van Emde Boas et al. (2019: 688).

In other words, they should destroy the ἄφρον μειράκιον in Cleinias and turn him into a φρόνιμος ἄνθρωπος, perhaps a φρόνιμος νεανίσκος.⁵⁴

This is an important turning point in the intellectual evolution of Cleinias in the *Euthydemus*. As Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi points out (2014: 55), Socrates responds to Cleinias' growing eloquence by addressing him in an increasingly laudatory way: ὦ Κλεινία (288d), ὦ καλὲ παῖ (289b) and, finally, ὦ κάλλιστε καὶ σοφώτατε Κλεινία 'most handsome and ingenious Cleinias' (290c), after Cleinias' brilliant explanation of the art of generalship (290b-d). Crito is equally impressed upon hearing Socrates' account of this:

- (40) τί λέγεις σύ, ὦ Σώκρατες, **ἐκεῖνο τὸ μειράκιον** τοιαῦτ' ἐφθέγγετο; ... οἶμαι γὰρ **αὐτὸν** ἐγώ, εἰ ταῦτ' εἶπεν, οὔτ' Εὐθυδήμου οὔτε ἄλλου οὐδενὸς ἔτ' ἀνθρώπου δεῖσθαι εἰς παιδείαν

What are you saying, Socrates? Did that [N] μειράκιον speak like that? I am sure that if he [M] spoke like this, he does not need education from Euthydemus or anyone else for that matter. (Plat., *Euth.* 290e)

Clearly, Crito could not believe that a μειράκιον would be able to speak in such a clear and sensible way. The masculine agreement on the anaphoric pronoun αὐτόν again indicates that Crito considers Cleinias to have grown out of the age class of μειράκιον and to be no longer in need of education.

An even more remarkable shift in grammatical gender agreement appears in Plato's *Protagoras*, when Agathon is introduced as follows:

- (41) παρεκάθητο δὲ αὐτῶ ἐπὶ ταῖς πλησίον κλῖναις Πausανίας τε ὁ ἐκ Κεραμῶν καὶ μετὰ Πausανίου **νέον τι ἔτι μειράκιον**, ὡς μὲν ἐγῶμαι **καλόν τε κάγαθόν** τὴν φύσιν, τὴν δ' οὖν ἰδέαν **πάνυ καλός**. ἔδοξα ἀκοῦσαι ὄνομα αὐτῶ εἶναι Ἀγάθωνα καὶ οὐκ ἂν θαυμάζοιμι εἰ **παιδικά** Πausανίου τυγχάνει **ῶν**

and near him on the adjacent beds lay Pausanias from Cerames and with Pausanias a μειράκιον still quite young [N], noble [N] of descent, I should say, and certainly handsome [M] of appearance. I thought I heard his name was Agathon and I should not be surprised if he is [M] Pausanias' παιδικά [N.PL].

(Plat., *Prot.* 315e)

In this passage, Agathon is presented as a relatively young μειράκιον.⁵⁵ The noun triggers neuter agreement on the adjectives καλόν τε κάγαθόν, which refer to his "birth and breeding" (Lamb 1924: 115), but masculine agreement on the next adjective καλός, which refers to his current appearance. It is again tempting to see in this grammatical gender mismatch an attempt at

54 The word ἄνθρωπος is used in this very passage (285b).

55 For speculations about Agathon's age see Denyer (2008: 84).

connecting the *μειράκιον* both with its past (*τὴν φύσιν*) and with its present (*τὴν ιδέαν*).

In his current state, Agathon is obviously sexually active, as is made clear by Socrates' suspicion that he is Pausanias' *παιδικά*. About the latter word Dover says: "The Greeks often used the word *paidika* in the sense of 'eromenos'. It is the neuter plural of an adjective *paidikos*, 'having to do with *paides*', but constantly treated as if it were a masculine singular" (1989: 16). In the passage just quoted (41), *παιδικά* is used as the predicative complement of *ὄν*, which shows masculine agreement, even though it refers back to *μειράκιον*.

There are many more cases of this kind of (mis)match between grammatical and natural gender. I conclude with some examples in which a neuter diminutive is used to refer to a female referent. The first one comes from Aristophanes' *Wasps*:

- (42) καὶ τὸ γύναιόν μ' ὑποθωπεῦσαν φυστὴν μᾶζαν προσενέγκη | κάπειτα
καθεζομένη παρ' ἔμοι προσαναγκάζη· φάγε τουτί
And my little woman [N], suspecting [N] something, offers me a puff pastry
and then, sitting [F] next to me, urges me: "Eat this!" (Ar., *Vesp.* 610-11)

In (42), *τὸ γύναιον* triggers neuter agreement on the first participle *ὑποθωπεῦσαν*, but the second participle *καθεζομένη* is feminine, which agrees with the natural, not the grammatical gender of *τὸ γύναιον*. A very similar example comes from the Septuagint:

- (43) καὶ αὐτοὶ εὐρίσκουσιν τὰ κοράσια ἐξεληλυθότα ὕδρευσασθαι ὕδωρ καὶ
λέγουσιν αὐταῖς· εἰ ἔστιν ἐνταῦθα ὁ βλέπων; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη τὰ κοράσια ...
And they found the girls [N], who had come out [N] to draw water, and they
said to them [F]: 'Is the seer here?' And the girls [N.PL] answered [SG] ...
(1 *Ki.* 9.11-12)

In (43), *τὰ κοράσια* triggers neuter agreement on the participle *ἐξεληλυθότα*, but the anaphoric pronoun *αὐταῖς* is feminine, the gender of which is again determined naturally, not grammatically. The following clause is therefore all the more remarkable, as the verb *ἀπεκρίθη* is singular, because the subject *τὰ κοράσια* is neuter. This is of course the normal agreement pattern for neuter plural subjects (van Emde Boas et al. 2019: 322), but in this particular case it indicates that the grammatical and not the natural gender prevails again.

The final example is taken from the story of Jesus' healing of the daughter of Jairus, one of the rulers of a Galilean synagogue. It is transmitted in three versions in the synoptic gospels. Mark's version begins as follows:

- (44) **τὸ θυγάτριόν** μου ἐσχάτως ἔχει, ἵνα ἐλθὼν ἐπιθῆς τὰς χεῖρας **αὐτῆ** ἵνα σωθῆ καὶ ζήσῃ

My little daughter [N] is dying; please come and lay your hand on her [F], so she may be healed and live. (Mc. 5.23)

Here again the feminine pronoun αὐτῆ does not agree with the neuter diminutive τὸ θυγάτριον.⁵⁶ Matthew (9.18) and Luke (8.42) read θυγάτηρ instead of θυγάτριον, which explains the feminine agreement in ἐπ' αὐτήν in the version of the former (ibid.). Jesus' intervention is interrupted by a hemorrhaged woman and in the meantime Jairus' daughter has died. Jesus immediately goes to his house and says the following to the grieving crowd according to Mark:

- (45) **τὸ παιδίον** οὐκ ἀπέθανεν ἀλλὰ καθεύδει ... καὶ κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς **τοῦ παιδίου** λέγει **αὐτῆ**· ταλιθα κουμ, ὃ ἐστὶν μεθερμηνευόμενον· **τὸ κοράσιον**, σοὶ λέγω, ἔγειρε· καὶ εὐθὺς ἀνέστη **τὸ κοράσιον** καὶ περιπάτει· ἦν γὰρ ἐτῶν δώδεκα ... καὶ εἶπεν δοθῆναι **αὐτῆ** φαγεῖν

The παιδίον [N] is not dead but sleeping ... and he took the hand of the παιδίον [v] and said to her [F]: *talitha koum*, which translates as: 'girl [v], I say to you, stand up', and immediately the girl [v] stood up and walked around, for she was twelve years old ... and he said that she [F] should be given to eat.

(Mc. 5.39-43)

Again feminine pronouns are used to refer to neuter diminutives: the second αὐτῆ (5.43) refers back to τὸ κοράσιον (5.43), but even more remarkable is the first αὐτῆ (5.41), which refers back to τὸ παιδίον (5.39) and τοῦ παιδίου (5.41). In Matthew's version, Jesus uses the neuter diminutive τὸ κοράσιον (9.24), which is again referred back to by a feminine pronoun in the phrase ἐκράτησεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῆς (9.25). Luke uses the feminine noun ἡ θυγάτηρ with female agreement patterns throughout his version of the story, with one exception: he uses the common noun ἡ παῖς [F] instead of the neuter diminutive τὸ κοράσιον to translate ταλιθα (Aramaic ܬܠܝܬܐ).

Judging from (43), (44) and (45) it seems safe to conclude that Greek girls behave exactly like German girls. The use of feminine pronouns to refer to the German neuter diminutive *Mädchen* has become a textbook example of a clash between semantics and grammar. Braun and Haig conclude that the choice depends both on the "semantics of age" (2010: 70) and on the "semantics of femaleness" (2010: 82), which is perfectly applicable to the examples just discussed, except that the definition of "femaleness" in terms of "age" differ in the case of Greek girls. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for the use of

⁵⁶ It may be noted that a few witnesses (\mathcal{P}^{45vid} A pc) read αὐτῶ instead of αὐτῆ.

masculine pronouns to refer to the neuter diminutives *παιδίον* and *μειράκιον*, which is equally dependent on the semantics of age and maleness.

7. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have discussed selected mismatches between natural and grammatical gender and the ways in which grammatical agreement is sometimes used to repair such mismatches. Epicene nouns (§2) are sometimes overtly marked to reveal the natural gender of their referents, such as the male tortoise in (4b). The natural gender of common nouns (§3) can be overtly marked by agreement on articles, pronouns, adjectives and participles, as in the case of the cock in (6). Masculine second declension nouns such as *θεός* are prototypically associated with male referents, as opposed to feminine first declension nouns such as *θεά* which are prototypically associated with female referents. Apparent mismatches of natural and grammatical gender often result in the reassignment of a noun to the other declension, such as the feminine second-declension noun *παρθένος*, which eventually became a first declension noun, i.e. *παρθένα* (§4).

Nouns referring to human beings of the same sex sometimes differ in grammatical gender (§5). In the division of the life cycle of male human beings according to (Pseudo) Hippocrates (17) and Ptolemy of Ascalon (18), the neuter *τὸ παιδίον* is younger than the masculine *ὁ παῖς*, who in turn is younger than the neuter *τὸ μειράκιον*, who in turn is younger than the masculine *ὁ νεανίσκος*. There seems no logical or, indeed, natural reason to shift gender twice in the coming of age of boys. The case of the common noun *παῖς* reveals that if the natural gender is not explicitly marked by agreement or, indeed, by the addition of the gendered adjectives *ἄρσιν* / *ἄρρην* and *θηλύς*, it is either ambiguous, especially in the plural (*παῖδες* = ‘children’, whether male or female) or, quite often, exclusively male (*παῖδες* = ‘sons’). In the latter case, the opposition between male and female children is often expressed by antonyms, e.g. *παῖδες* ~ *θύγατρεις* (22).

Diminutive nouns offer the most exciting insights in the way natural and grammatical gender interact and, indeed, clash. Neuter diminutives normally trigger neuter agreement patterns, but sometimes the semantics of age and “maleness” / “femaleness” have an impact on the choices speakers and writers make. Grammatically neuter nouns such as *παιδίον*, *μειράκιον*, *γύναιον*, *κοράσιον* and *θυγάτριον* are sometimes referred to by masculine and feminine pronouns, and in some cases even trigger ‘gendered’ agreement on adjectives or participles, as in the case of *μειράκιον* in (33) and (41). Braun and Haig conclude their study of the use of feminine pronouns to refer to German *Mädchen* that “people perceive biological gender as more relevant for adults

than for children” and that “a natural boundary, that of puberty, appears to be relevant in the statistical distribution of feminine and neuter forms” (2010: 82). A more detailed study is needed to determine to what extent this also applies to Greek, but the data presented in this paper indicate that this is a worthwhile topic for future research.

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about the relation between natural and grammatical gender in Greek and the ways in which the twain are matched or mismatched. A variety of topics is discussed, including the relation between grammatical gender and declension, the resolution of gender clashes in epicene nouns and the marking of natural gender in common nouns. Particular attention is given to the gendering of neuter diminutives with male or female referents. Age and particular aspects of "maleness" or "femaleness" are shown to be major determinants in triggering male or female instead of neuter agreement patterns, especially on anaphoric pronouns, but occasionally also on other word classes such as predicative adjectives and participles.

Keywords: Ancient Greek, natural gender, grammatical gender, gender agreement, pronominal reference

POVZETEK

Spol in ujemanje: (ne)skladja med naravnim in slovničnim spolom v grščini

Članek obravnava razmerje med slovničnim in naravnim spolom v grščini ter primere, v katerih prihaja znotraj navedene dvojice do ujemanja oziroma neujemanja. Naslovljena je vrsta vprašanj, denimo vprašanje razmerja med slovničnim in naravnim spolom, razreševanja protislovja med naravnim in slovničnim spolom pri epicenih ter zaznamovanja naravnega spola pri večspolnih samostalnikih. Posebna pozornost je namenjena problemu spola pomanjševalnic s slovničnim srednjim spolom ter z nanosniki moškega ali ženskega biološkega spola. Članek pokaže, da sta odločilna dejavnika, ki vplivata na privzetje moških ali ženskih vzorcev ujemanje namesto vzorcev, značilnih za srednji spol, starost ter določeni vidiki »moškosti« ali »ženskosti«. To še posebej pride do izraza pri anaforičnih zaimkih, občasno pa tudi pri pridevnikih, kadar so rabljeni kot povedkovo določilo, in pri deležnikih.

Ključne besede: stara grščina, naravni spol, slovnični spol, ujemanje slovničnega in naravnega spola, nanašanje zaimka